

PRACTICAL AI BOUNDARY GUIDE

Where AI fails

A practical guide to the tasks AI still cannot own - where judgement, relationship and accountability must remain human.

Let AI assist the work. Keep a person owning the outcome.

Capability can change. Commercial accountability does not.

01

Separate assistance.

Drafting and organising can sit inside a person-led process.

02

Locate judgement.

Context, discretion and empathy are not routine processing.

03

Keep ownership.

Someone approves, explains and fixes the outcome.

If a person must explain the outcome, keep them in the workflow.

Use this guide →

MISSION & SCOPE

Useful assistance is not the same as ownership.

AI can make parts of a task faster without being the right place to put final judgement, relationship or accountability.

THIS GUIDE IS USEFUL IF

- You are deciding which work AI may assist.
- A mistake could affect money, safety or customers.
- The team needs a visible ownership boundary.

THIS GUIDE WILL NOT

- Claim a permanent list of AI limits.
- Treat technical possibility as commercial suitability.
- Remove people from every assisted task.

How to draw the boundary

01

Break down

Identify the repeatable, pattern-based steps.

02

Test consequence

Ask what happens if the output is wrong or badly judged.

03

Assign ownership

Name the person who decides, commits and recovers.

A task can be technically possible and still be commercially inappropriate to delegate.

A sat-nav can route a trip. It cannot know you want the scenic road today. The tool follows available patterns; the person owns context, preference and consequence.

BOUNDARY TESTS

Six signals that a person still needs to own the outcome.

Useful workflows often combine AI assistance with visible human accountability.

Ask who explains the result.

If the answer is a person, that person needs a real control point.

01

Judgement

Does the task require discretion rather than a repeatable rule?

02

Relationship

Could tone, history or trust materially change the right response?

03

Consequence

Can being wrong affect money, safety, legal exposure or commitments?

04

Exceptions

Do unusual cases reveal hidden experience or context?

05

Fallback

Can work continue safely when AI is wrong or unavailable?

06

Accountability

Is one person or role responsible from start to finish?

OWNERSHIP BOUNDARY

Divide the workflow by the work, not by the tool.

AI can prepare and transform. A person still owns the points where context or consequence enter.

AI CAN ASSIST	A PERSON MUST OWN
01 Draft and organise Prepare wording, options, summaries or structured information.	01 Decide and commit Own legal, financial, safety or customer commitments.
02 Identify patterns Surface recurring themes or likely categories for review.	02 Resolve exceptions Apply context, empathy and discretion when the normal path does not fit.
USEFUL LEVERAGE Shorten the work before the decision.	VISIBLE ACCOUNTABILITY Keep a named person responsible for the final outcome and recovery.

Need the checkpoint? [Read Human-in-the-Loop →](#)

COMMERCIAL EFFECT

The wrong boundary can make a fast process more expensive.

Handing over the decision can create rework, customer recovery and exposure larger than the time saved.

AI drafts, person decides

Useful leverage

The repetitive first pass is faster while accountability stays visible.

AI decides, nobody owns

Hidden exposure

A wrong conclusion can move directly into action.

Sensitive reply reviewed

Trust protected

A person controls tone, nuance and the final resolution.

Sensitive reply automated

Context missed

Complaints or disputes receive a generic response with no judgement.

Fallback defined

Continuity

The process has a safe human path when the tool cannot continue.

No fallback

Stalled work

People improvise recovery after the failure has already reached the customer.

Ask who must explain the outcome if this step is wrong.

The value is often in shortening work before a decision, not pretending the business removed the decision itself.

FIVE SIGNS AI HAS BEEN GIVEN TOO MUCH OWNERSHIP

Problems to catch before assistance becomes authority.

These faults matter more than whether the tool can technically perform the task.

Critical

Sign 1

AI makes a high-consequence judgement unsupervised

A legal, financial or safety conclusion moves into action without review.

WHAT IT COSTS

Business exposure where the consequence dwarfs the time saved.

Major

Sign 2

AI owns the final response on sensitive matters

Complaints or disputes are handled without human tone or resolution.

WHAT IT COSTS

Escalation, loss of trust and missed customer context.

Major

Sign 3

The output is treated as the decision

AI analysis is accepted as the final answer rather than one input.

WHAT IT COSTS

Context disappears and nobody can explain why the call was appropriate.

Moderate

Sign 4

There is no fallback when the tool cannot handle the job

The workflow assumes every case will fit and the tool will always be available.

WHAT IT COSTS

Stalled work and manual improvisation under pressure.

Moderate

Sign 5

One good result is treated as permanent proof

Past success becomes the reason later cases receive less review.

WHAT IT COSTS

Safeguards gradually disappear while conditions keep changing.

Capability and consistency are different properties.

Do not promote a task from assisted to unsupervised because a handful of examples looked good.

CORRECTION AND SELF-ASSESSMENT

Five questions before AI owns more of the task.

Common myth: “If it worked once, it will keep working the same way.” Better framing: success proves one set of conditions, not permanent reliability.

01

What judgement is hidden inside the task?

Look for context, discretion, empathy and interpretation.

02

What is the consequence if the output is wrong?

Increase human control as money, safety, legal exposure or commitments rise.

03

Which cases do not fit the normal pattern?

Exceptions often reveal the part that cannot be reduced to a standard path.

04

Who owns the final outcome?

If nobody can answer clearly, accountability has been delegated with the work.

05

What happens when AI is wrong, slow or unavailable?

A reliable process has a fallback before it needs one.

WORKING OWNERSHIP STANDARD

A reusable boundary your team can apply to each task.

Make explicit what AI may prepare, what a person decides and how exceptions recover.

01 Name the task

Break the work into actual steps rather than one job label.

02 Mark AI assistance

Identify pattern-based drafting, sorting or transformation.

03 Locate judgement

Find where context, relationship or discretion enters.

04 Test consequence

Rate what being wrong would mean commercially.

05 Define fallback

Describe the safe path when the normal route fails.

06 Name the owner

Assign a person or role responsible end to end.

INSTEAD OF

“AI can do the job.”

No boundary, fallback or accountable owner.

Reusable ownership boundary

TASK:

AI MAY PREPARE:

PERSON MUST DECIDE:

HIGH-RISK STEP:

EXCEPTIONS:

FALLBACK:

FINAL OWNER:

REVIEW TRIGGER:

DISCUSS THE TASK →

Set the ownership line.

Name judgement, fallback and owner.

DUE DILIGENCE

Ask which part AI should own.

Three rules and two next steps for a safer ownership decision.

01

Map before delegating

Separate drafting, transformation, judgement and commitment.

02

Match control to risk

Keep stronger human involvement where being wrong costs more.

03

Plan the fallback

Define how people recover when AI cannot handle the case.

Technical possibility does not remove commercial accountability.

If a provider cannot explain ownership, exceptions and fallback plainly, keep digging.

CONTINUE LEARNING

What an AI Agent Actually Is

See how multi-step action differs from a chatbot answer.

[Read next →](#)

AI Foundations

Continue through the rest of this collection.

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Let AI assist. Keep a person owning the outcome.

Use AI where it removes repeatable effort. Keep human judgement where context, relationship or consequence still matters.

PRIMARY NEXT STEP

What an AI Agent Actually Is

Understand the difference between answering and taking multi-step action.

[Continue →](#)

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Need help drawing the boundary?

Bring one task you are considering handing to AI. Separate the repeatable work from judgement, risk and fallback.

[Discuss the task →](#)